

# STENNIS CONGRESSIONAL STAFF FELLOWS PROGRAM



The **Stennis Congressional Staff Fellows Program** is a practical, bipartisan leadership development experience for senior-level staff of the United States Congress. The program focuses on future challenges to Congress as an institution of American democracy and the leadership role played by senior Congressional staff in meeting those challenges. In each Congress, 28 to 32 Stennis Fellows are selected by an independent panel. Each group is balanced by party and chamber. Stennis Fellows meet six to eight times over a 15-18 month period, with times and locations selected to be convenient to the Fellows.

## LEARNING AGENDA & THEME:

*Meeting the Legislative Branch Leadership Challenge in an Era of Mistrust, Disinformation and Miscommunication*

One of the unique features of the **Stennis Fellows Program** is that Fellows determine their own learning agenda within a core theme. Nationally and internationally renowned experts will meet with the Stennis Fellows to explore various aspects of the agenda. While insights from guest experts are valuable, even more significant is the dialogue, learning and relationship building that takes place among the Stennis Fellows.

At the conclusion of the Fellowship period, Fellows summarize their learning experience and, with the assistance of Stennis Center staff, prepare a summary of the Fellowship experience for the Congressional leadership and others interested in the future of the United States Congress. The Stennis Fellows Program is not an advocacy effort; ideas developed through the Fellowship are presented as a resource for Stennis Fellows, Members of Congress, students of Congress, and others who share an interest in the work.

Building on the work of Fellows in previous Congresses, the 115th Congress Stennis Fellows will focus on the theme:

***Meeting the Legislative Branch Leadership Challenge in an Era of Mistrust, Disinformation and Miscommunication.***

The Constitution of the United States envisions that the legitimacy and effectiveness of our government requires finding common ground, particularly through the elected representatives of the people who serve in Congress. Yet, the ability of Congress to find common ground is being tested on many levels and in many ways. This challenging environment raises important questions about how Congress can fulfill its leadership responsibilities in a representative democracy. For example:



- *How does the proliferation of channels of communication, the speed of dissemination, and the growing role of social media affect our ability to find common ground within Congress and among the people?*
- *How does the blurring of the distinction between fact, opinion and disinformation affect our ability to govern?*
- *How can we create real dialogue in a world in which people seek out the like-minded while often misunderstanding, discounting or even demonizing “others?”*
- *Is income and opportunity inequality among Americans diminishing our ability to find common ground?*

- *To what degree does the polarization and partisanship in our politics reflect deep divisions in society, or are those divisions more a product of those politics?*
- *Does diminishing trust and confidence in a wide range of institutions and established authorities affect the ability of Congress to fulfill its responsibilities?*
- *Are technological, social and political changes moving us toward more direct forms of democracy? Can these changes be harnessed instead to increase the capacity of Congress to lead in a representative democracy?*

Stennis Fellows of the 115th Congress will set and pursue their learning agenda around this theme. Fellows will look ahead to explore how best to meet the challenges to Congress posed by these and other issues.

## ELIGIBILITY

Stennis Fellows must be nominated by a Member of Congress and be senior-level Congressional staff such as committee staff directors, chiefs of staff, legislative directors, counsels, and senior professional staff.

### *Nominees should demonstrate:*

- A track record of leadership in key staff positions (personal or committee) characterized by senior management responsibility and involvement in significant aspects of the legislative process;
- A reputation for statesmanship – caring for the evolution of Congress and the political system as a whole;
- Significant career commitment to public service, with special emphasis on Congress;
- A desire to make a significant contribution to further the mission of the program; and
- A commitment to learn and fully participate in the responsibilities of the fellowship.



Nominations of high-potential staffers with limited Hill experience also will be considered. Re-nominations of senior-level staff not selected in prior Congresses are encouraged. The ability to devote the time necessary to participate fully in the program is a prerequisite to being selected and retaining the designation of Stennis Fellow.

The Stennis Center seeks diversity in the Fellows Program and does not discriminate among individual nominees on the basis of race, religion, sex, national or ethnic origin, disability, or veteran status.

## STENNIS FELLOWS PROFILE

Over 300 Stennis Fellows have completed their Fellowship and are now part of a growing academy of Senior Stennis Fellows. Many continue to serve in the Congress where their combined experience totals almost 3800 years. More than half of the Senior Fellows had ten years of experience or more at the time of their selection as a Stennis Fellow.



## PROJECTED CALENDAR HIGHLIGHTS

<b>March 20, 2017</b>	Application Materials Due from Nominated Staff Leaders
<b>April/May 2017</b>	Selection Committee Meets to Finalize Selection
<b>June 2017</b>	Welcome Reception and Inaugural Meeting
<b>July 2017</b>	Learning Agenda Setting Session
<b>October 13-14, 2017</b>	Overnight Dialogue Retreat
<b>November 2017 to April 2018</b>	Roundtable Sessions (3-5) with Guest Experts
<b>May 2018</b>	Overnight Synthesis Retreat
<b>September 2018</b>	Celebration of 115th Congress Stennis Fellows Legacy

## STENNIS FELLOWS PROGRAM MISSION

- Enhance the capacity and commitment of exceptional senior-level staff members to “Look Ahead” to what will be needed to better serve Congress and its Members in a world of rapid change;
- Foster dialogue and the exchange of ideas among senior-level staff members in a neutral venue, and create a valuable network of bipartisan, bicameral working relationships;
- Produce a useful result – an ongoing legacy of learning – for those who care about the long-term effectiveness of Congress as a governing institution; and
- Recognize and honor senior-level staff of the United States House of Representatives and United States Senate who have demonstrated outstanding leadership in public service.

## FELLOWS PROGRAM STAFF

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The John C. Stennis Center for Public Service Leadership was established in 1988 under the legislative branch to promote and strengthen public service leadership within the Congress and the Nation. The Stennis Center accomplishes its mission through leadership development programs, conferences, seminars, and special projects. The Stennis Center is headquartered in Starkville, Mississippi, with an office in Washington, DC.

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**Stennis Center *for* Public Service Leadership**

